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ABSTRACT

In 1991, the Flemish Ministry of Education enacted a radical reorganization and rethinking of the education inspectorate in Flanders. Presenting an overview of this change, this paper reports on research that evaluated the effects of the 1991 decree regarding inspection funding. It focuses on the ways schools reacted to and made use of facilities concerning quality control and support. The central research interest addressed the way primary schools deal with external facilities for educational quality. The criteria for effect was whether, and to what degree, the schools' use of the external quality services effectively contributed to teachers' professional development and the effect on the schools' organizational development. Three principles characterized the methodology: the interactionist point of view, a contextualized stance, and the constructivist principle. A qualitative-interpretative approach and case studies were used for the study. The general conclusion was that the external quality services are not having an impact at the local school level, caused in part by the micropolitical processes in the schools, the problem of specific professional competence for counselors and principals, and the need for internal structures in the schools to support the incorporation of interventions by the external quality services. (Contains 38 references.) (RJM)

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(Flemish Forum for Educational Research)

Evaluation of a national policy for quality improvement in schools: external requirements versus local implementation patterns

INTERNAL USE OF EXTERNAL CONTROL AND SUPPORT FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT.

The response to a national policy by Primary Schools

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Paper to be presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego 1998

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Internal use of external control and support for quality improvement. The response to a national policy by Primary Schools

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POLICY CONTEXT AND RESEARCH INTEREST

Decentralization, responsibilization of the local school, quality control and support at school level, "lump sum"-financing of in-service training... all these concepts refer to a recurrent theme in the educational policy by the Flemish Ministery of Education in the '90-s. A concern for educational quality has taken up a very central place in the discourse and practice of the policy makers. Schools are strongly stimulated to engage in permanent processes of organizational development and quality improvement. The policy makers perceive the local school as the crucial level for assuring educational quality. The people in the local school are considered to know best what the particular educational needs, possibilities and constraints are they have to deal with in their specific context. The central administration confines its prescriptions to minimal norms of quality (basic goals; minimum curriculum) that have to be met by all schools. Although this "stepping back" of the central administration is certainly also inspired by concerns of budget control and cut backs, the policy trend toward stimulating local school development is an interesting phenomenon. Coming from a longstanding tradition of quite detailed central prescriptions and instructions by the Ministery, schools are now facing a whole set of new tasks and responsibilities. At the same time, however, this new policy opens up new opportunities for schools to develop a locally adapted educational project (within the boundaries of the "minimal goals") and thus to grow professionally.

In 1991 (July, 17) these policy options by the Ministery were embodied in the *Decree on Inspectorate and Educational Counsellors (Decreet betreffende Inspectie en Pedagogische Begeleiding).*[1] This important decree marked a new era for schools in Flanders, since firstly it encompassed a radical reorganization and rethinking of the educational inspectorate and secondly it initiated the official establishment of a new professional body of "educational counsellors". Contrary to the tradition of an individual inspector visiting and assessing individual teachers in

[1] "Decree" is the official word for laws that are promulgated by the Flemish Parliament in the federal structure of the Belgian State. "Law" is used for the lawmaking by the Federal Parliament.

their classrooms, the renewed inspectorate operates as a team and adresses the school as whole. Since 1991, schools are visited (once every 6 years) by a team of inspectors that makes a systematic evaluation of the educational quality of the entire school. These inspectors thus are exclusively responsible for the evaluation and the control of the educational quality in the schools.

Complementary to this quality control, but strictly seperated from it, the body of educational counsellors -a new profession in the field- was created to support schools in their efforts to maintain or improve the quality of their education. Their task thus is to guide, support, help, sustain schools, but not to evaluate or control them.[2] Control and support of educational quality are thus supposed to be two separate tasks, to be taken care of by two seperate bodies. This strict division between assessment and support was assumed to provide the best chances for successful and effective improvement of the educational quality.

Parallel to this the policy for funding INSET also changed. Schools now receive an "envelope", a lump sum with which they can buy INSET according to their specific needs and wishes.

This paper reports on a research project -funded by the Flemish Ministry of Education- that aimed at evaluating the effects of the 1991 Decree and the new system for INSET funding. In other words, we studied the way schools react to and make use of the facilities concerning quality control and support. As such, this evaluation study exemplifies the more general question about how or to what extent policy makers have an impact on what is going on in the schools, on the workfloor with teachers and pupils.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The **central research interest** in this study thus concerned the way primary schools deal with the external facilities for educational quality, more in particular the new inspectorate, the educational counsellors and INSET, and whether these external services contributed to teachers' professional development and school development. In the rest of this paper we will use "external quality services" as the general term to refer to inspectorate, counsellors and INSET. Succesfull school reform -as Smylie (1995) rightly argues- has to incorporate opportunities for the teachers to grow professionally. Therefore we used as a criterium for effect in our study *whether and the degree to which the schools' use of the external quality services effectively contributed to individual teachers' professional development. But as a second general criterium we considered the organizational development of the school also necessary.*

[2] An exception has to be made for the counsellors for the "official" or fully state-funded schools ("Gemeenschapsonderwijs"), who can get the formal task to assess teachers' professional competence e.g. in the perspective of receiving a tenured position (civil servant).

This general research goal was translated in more focused research questions:

1. Which different configurations can be distinguished in primary schools' dealing with the educational quality services? This question aims at a systematic *description* of the ways in which schools deal with the external quality services.
2. How can the different configurations be explained and understood? What are the *determinants* of the (lack of) effect by INSET, inspectorate and educational counsellors?

Three **general principles** characterize our theoretical and methodological approach.
The research questions already suggest that we focus on the interactions between the school and teachers on the one hand, and the external services for educational quality on the other. From this *interactionist* point of view, we assume that the character and the degree of the changes in the school have to be explained from the interplay of certain characteristics of the external services (the provider system) and characteristics of the client system, i.c. the school and the teachers.
We also take a *contextualised* stance. The way schools and teachers deal with the external quality services is to an important degree determined by specific, local conditions (e.g. the actual composition of the school team; the population of the pupils; the relation between the school and the local community, etc.). Local educational needs, but also the goals and beliefs of the schoolteam "colour" the way the external services are dealt with. For that reason, our analysis of the determinants was first of all embedded in the local context. Only in a second step, the analysis moved to more de-contextualised, general conclusions.
Closely connected to this is the *constructivist principle*. The way teachers and schools deal with the external services is also dependent on the meaning these services get in the eyes of the school members involved. From their perception of the external services, the school members construe a reaction that is meaningful to them. In other words, the subjective perception of the external services gets a crucial place in the study, in order to achieve an adequate understanding and valid explanation.

The research questions and the general theoretical principles were translated into a series of educational concepts, constituting the **conceptual framework** that guided both the collection and the analysis of the research data. The concepts, as well as their "operationalization", were borrowed from recent research at the Center for Educational Policy and Innovation (Clement & Vandenberghe, 1997; Kelchtermans, 1993; Staessens, 1993). The conceptual framework on the one hand thus contained a set of indicators concerning characteristics of the"offer" by the educational quality services (the "provider system"), e.g. form; content; availability of follow up; procedure, duration, etc..
On the other hand, there were the characteristics of the client system, i.c. the individual te-

achers and the school. We used indicators for effects both at the individual level and at the organizational level, since school development and individual teacher's professional development in our opinion have to run in parallel and complementary to one another in order to provide lasting effects (see e.g. Little, 1993; Hargreaves, 1995; Smylie,1994; also Clement & Vandenberghe, 1997 and Kelchtermans, 1996). As such the concepts guiding our data collection included:

* at the level of the individual teachers:
  - teachers' and principal's professional self (= representations of oneself as a teacher or principal, encompassing the components: self image; self esteem; task perception; job motivation; future perspective)
  - teachers' and principal's subjective educational theory (= personal system of knowledge and beliefs on teaching and schooling)(Kelchtermans, 1993).

* at the level of the school organization:
  - the leadership by the principal (Vandenberghe & Van der Vegt, 1992);
  - school culture (Staessens, 1993);
  - collegial collaboration (Clement & Vandenberghe, 1997);

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Because of the central place teachers' and principals' perceptions and interpretations have in our study, we chose a qualitative-interpretative approach and -more in particular- the methodology of **case-studies** (o.m. Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1989). Yin argues that this research methodology is particularly relevant when "a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control" (Yin, 1989, p.20). Case studies make it possible to ground the research in the experiences of the school members. By opting for a "multiple case design", in which different case studies are developed from the same research question, comparative analysis remains possible, thus creating a perspective for more generalizing conclusions. Through the case studies it is possible to identify certain scenarios, processes or patterns that expand beyond the specific local situation. Or in Becker's words: "generalizations are (...) about a process, the same no matter where it occurs, in which variations in conditions create variations in results" (Becker, 1990, p. 240).

Our study encompassed **two research phases**, in each of which -although in different ways- case studies were developed in Flemish primary schools. Common to both phases was the collecting

of data from different respondents in the same school, in order to develop an in-depth and contextualised understanding of the interplay between the external quality services and the functioning of teachers and schools.

In the **first phase** we developed extensive case studies of four Flemish Primary Schools. The research period started just before the audit by the inspectorate, continued immedeately after the audit and also included a follow-up about six months later. By this design it was possible to both collect the data almost parallel with the audit, and to follow the development in the school over a longer period of time in order to explore the eventual effects of the audit. Data were collected through document analysis (i.c. information brochures about the school; the school's educational project; minutes of staff meetings and -after the audit- the inspectorate's report on the school); observations and interviews. Since the interviews constituted the core of the data collection process, specific guidelines were developed for interviews with the principal and the teachers about their experiences with the inspectorate, the educational counsellors and the INSET. The interviews explored teachers' and principals' expectations towards the audit by the inspectorate, as well as the eventual effects (in terms of learning experiences) of the inspectorate's audit, the meetings with the counsellors or INSET activities. In the four schools 92 interviews were collected.

The interviews were transcribed, coded and interpretatively analyzed at the level of the individual respondent. In a next step, these data from the respondents of the same school were integrated with the other data (observations; document analysis) at the school level. This resulted in an extensive case report per school, structured by a fixed set of paragraphs, organizing the data at school level in a similar way for the four schools. In a final step these school reports underwent a "horizontal analysis", in which the cases were systematically compared for similarities and differences between schools (cross-site analysis; Miles & Huberman, 1984). The findings from phase 1 provided working hypotheses that were further explorated in a larger number of schools in phase 2.

In **Phase 2** 12 primary schools were involved, that had had an audit by the inspectorate about two years before the study. In this second phase we wanted to focus more on the effects of the external services over a longer period of time. For this purpose we adapted the procedure for data collection as used in Phase 1 so as to achieve a rich data set, but in a less time-consuming way. The datacollection encompassed a questionnaire, a structured interview and observation. Respondents first filled out the questionaire, that operated afterwards as a starting point for the structured interview in which the respondent's answers to the questionnaire were explored in more detail.The data analysis in Phase 2 followed the same principles as in Phase 1. Data were

firstly analysed at the level of the individual respondent, and in a second step at the school level. Data from questionnaire and interview were transcribed and coded, then submitted to interpretative analysis that resulted in a summarizing, prestructured document (as in Phase 1). The reports of the schools were then comparatively analysed.

RESULTS

In this section the results of our analysis are presented, aimed at understanding the (lack of) effect the external quality services had on schools and teachers, from the perspective of the principal and the teachers. By focusing the analysis on the interaction between the external services and the school members, we also sought to understand the determinants of these effects. Effectivity of external quality services is thus understood in terms of changes in teachers' and principals' actions and thinking, that reflect individual professional development and school development. Notions like "effects" and "determinants" are thus not to be understood in a lineair-causal way, but rather in terms of the *meaningful interaction* between characteristics of the services and characteristics of the client system (e.g. teachers; principals).
This interaction, however, is not neutral or -rather-, is not selfevidently aimed at the realisation of a unequivocal (uncontested and commonly shared) idea of quality . External interventions as well as internal initiatives concerning educational quality are at the same time used by teachers and principals with different personal interests. In the discussion of the results we will pay extensive attention to this micropolitical use of the external quality services.
But first we will give an overview of the major determinants of the (lack of) effects by the external quality services. In other words, we will discuss the factors that were found to make a difference in schools' dealing with it. We then turn to a micropolitical analysis in order to explain the effects of the processes of power and struggles between different sets of professional interests that are provoked or intensified by the external quality services.

(1) Determinants of the inspectorate's effects

The audit by the inspectorate is meant to be an assessment of the educational quality of the school: the inspectorate controls whether the school meets the legal quality norms (= the official minimal goals). The teams of inspectors thus have an official mandate and are equiped with a set of instruments that were developed specifically for this purpose. The audit results in a written report, presenting the outcomes of the audit, as well as a list of issues that the schools are supposed to work on and to improve. For taking up these follow-up issues, schools can call on the educational counsellors for help and support or they can engage in certain INSET-acti-

vities. If the general conclusion of the audit is not entirely positive, the school gets a period of time (officially 300 working days) to work on the negative issues and improve them, at the end of which a new audit by the inspectorate will follow. It is thus important to see that the inspectorate operates as an agency of quality assessment, with the power of sanctioning the school. Schools cannot escape the inspectorate and this certainly affects their dealing with the audit. However, apart from this compulsory character of the audit, its effects on the school are mediated by a whole set of other factors.

(a) Information about the audit

The respondents in our study stressed the need for sufficient and clear information about the goals, the procedure and the consequences of the inspectorate's audit. They wanted to know what to expect from the audit in order to make sure that they could provide a full and valid picture of the school. School members who didn't agree with the outcomes of the audit often refer back to shortcomings in the procedure. They question the validity and reliability of the audit outcomes by blaming the procedure for insufficiently acknowledging the particular context of the school or for the lack of information available about the procedure.

(b) The inspectorate's attitude towards and relation with the school members

The inspectorate's attitudes towards teachers and principal during the audit was found to be a second important determinant. A distanced and authoritarian attitude was perceived by the schools as a denial of their professionality. In contrast, a "human", but critical, attitude contributed to the schools' willingness to accept the outcomes of the audit and enhanced their will to take initiatives to improve the educational quality, as suggested in the audit report. Our data showed that there exist important differences between inspector teams and even among members of the same team, in spite of the fact that all members of the inspectorate have a clearly defined and common procedure to follow during the audit period.
Closely linked to this is the persisting need among teachers to receive individual feedback (although the inspectors are not longer supposed by the new Decree to give feedback to individual teachers!). However, teachers still have a strong desire to hear from someone with authority, how they are performing and more in particular that "they are doing well". Especially after classroom observations by the inspectors teachers want to hear "what they really thought about it". The absence of any comments or feedback leaves the teachers with feelings of uncertainty, self-doubts and powerlessness (see also Kelchtermans 1996 for the impact of feelings of

vulnerability and uncertainty on teachers' job performance and professional development).

Summarizing we can say that a positive experience of the audit by the teachers greatly enhances a constructive dealing with the conclusions and advices in the audit report. Personal and professional recognition by the inspectors remains an important issue to teachers and principals.

(c) Perception of the audit procedure

For principals' and teachers' acceptance and constructive treatment of the conclusions in the audit report, it is of crucial importance that they perceive the procedure of the audit as a legitimate, valid and reliable way of assessing the school. If the inspectorate's influence on the school would only rely on its power to sanction the schools in case of severe insufficiency, there is a real risk that schools will confine themselves to superficial and formal arrangements in order to "look in order", but without the audit having any effect in terms of professional development. Several elements appeared to play a role in this:

- the complementary use by the inspectorate of different techniques for data collection (document analysis; classroom observation; interviews);
- a balancing of attention given to the school and individual teachers' practices;
- an equal treatment of all school members. Different treatments (e.g. long versus short visit to the classroom) raise teachers' suspicion and scepticism about the outcomes (see below).

(d) The 'hidden curriculum' of the audit procedure

The audit procedure is not only a means for evaluating and assessing, but at the same time - through the questions asked- communicates a concept of "good teaching" and how to achieve it (e.g. the emphasis on collegial collaboration; the importance to provide facilities for children with special needs; the development of all dimensions in childrens' personality, etc.). In other words, the procedure is at the same time normative and informative about what counts nowadays as the "official" vision on good teaching. This vision, however, is not selfevidently accepted by all teachers and principals (see below).

Several principals in our sample found it illuminating and very helpfull that the audit procedure gave them a clearer understanding of what the government apparently is expecting from them. The audit procedure and more in particular the authority of the inspectorate, gave them the feeling of certainty about right and wrong, in times when consensus about norms in teaching is ever more debated and contested (see also Hargreaves, 1994). We want to highlight that the

issue of the principals' professionality is at stake here. This need for official norms mirrors the deeply rooted culture of "following the book", that is still quite vivid among primary school principals and stands in clear contrast with the overal trend towards responsibilizing and professionalizing the local school. In our opinion this constitutes the Achilles' heel, not only for the impact of the external quality services, but also for a succesful development towards professional schools, with a clear vision and an educational project embedded in the local context.

(e) Form, content and presentation of the audit report

Several elements of the report's text proved to be relevant determinants:

- both principals and teachers insist on clear, unequivocal and straightforward language (minimal use of technical-administrative educational jargon);
- the content had to be valid. This means that there should be no contradiction between the report content and what school teams had understood and heard during the audit. If so, this was perceived by the teachers in terms of "betrayal", being "deceived" or not being taken serious;
- a limited number of issues for follow up. Long lists of shortcomings enhance frustration and non-recognition, rather than stimulating positive follow-up. A good balance of positive and negative elements also contributed to acceptance of the report outcomes;
- schools are also asking for suggestions or perspectives for solutions to the problems that were identified by the inspectorate. They wanted to use the inspectors' know how in order to find ways of succesfully dealing with their conclusions. However, this conflicts with a strict separation between control and support, as established by the Decree of 1991. Starting points for solution and improvement are supposed to be provided by the counsellors and not by the assessing inspectors.

The final conclusion of the audit report is always formulated as: "positive", "positive on the condition of certain improvements implemented" and "negative". These outcomes in itself also appear to determine the way schools deal with the report. We found two ways in which schools reacted to a positive outcome. The first reaction was one of relief: "now we will be left in peace for some years". The second one went further and can be summarized as "okay, that lies behind us; let's get back to serious business". This is not to be seen as passivity or indifference by the schools, but on the contrary, as a professional and autonomous reaction of putting the own agenda back in business and working on the local priorities. In the rare case of an outspoken negative conclusion, schools experienced a strong pressure to take initiatives for improvement, because they knew that there would be a follow-up audit within a year and that the mere

existence of the school was threathened (at least in principle).

Finally the way in which the report was presented turned out to be an important determinant as well. We found very different practices regarding the presentation of the audit report (only reading the report; the principal writing a summary for the school team, with eventually a copy of the full report available for inspection in the principal's office; presenting only the follow-up issues to the team; and several other variants). The crucial element in all this, however, is the meaning this presentatión gets for the teachers. In schools with a good relationship between the teachers and the principal, teachers didn't care very much about whether they received the full report or not. In those schools hardly any teachers used the opportunity to read the full report if it was available. However, in the case of a troubled relationship between the principal and (some) teachers, presenting only a summary raised suspicion and was perceived as "hiding information", "deception", etc. In some cases the principal asked the inspector to come and present the report to the team. This way, the inspector had to take eventual difficult questions and critiques by the team, whereas and the principal -although fully agreeing with the outcomes- could remain in the backstage and thus getting less blamed for "communicating the bad news". This way he maintained a more serene position to start working with his team on the follow-up issues.

(f) Determinants in the client system (teachers; principals)

Our data revealed that many primary school teachers are still not used to professionally account for their practice. This supposes a reflective attitude and skills that they often don't master. However, the way of interviewing by the inspectorate clearly suggests that these compentences are expected (= also part of the hidden curriculum of the audit procedure). This discrepancy between the inspectorate's expectations and the teachers' functioning often leads to negative feelings in the teachers. Repeatedly having to admit that one doesn't know something or hasn't properly understood some concepts, negatively affects teachers' self esteem and leads to defensive reactions of denial and resistance.

At the level of the school, the data showed that taking up the follow-up issues in a systematic way, is a crucial condition for the audit's effectiveness in terms of promoting quality improvement. In most cases this is directly linked to the existence of internal support structures or networks. In schools where teachers are working in isolation, the fear for negative criticisms by colleagues and the insecurity about one's own professional competences is often so high, that teachers can't allow themselves to engage in constructive ways of further development

(individually or as a school) (See also Clement & Vandenberghe, 1997; Bakkenes, 1996).

(2) Determinants of the effectivity of the educational counsellors

Complementary to the assessment by the inspectorate, the educational counsellors are expected to support schools in their initiatives on quality improvement. Schools can ask their help in working on the follow-up issues in the inspectorate's report or in the implementation of certain innovations, that are initiated by the school itself. On the other hand, the counsellors themselves also offer a programme of support activities on themes that are supposed to be relevant for the school and to which the schools can subscribe.

Three important observations from our research data have to be considered here first. First, the counsellors' work mostly takes the form of unique training sessions, offered to one school or to teachers from schools in the same region. Many of the counsellors' activities are in fact forms of in-service training. For many teachers therefor the distinctions between the counsellor and the in-service-training remains unclear. Secondly, we have to conclude that the teachers hardly ascribe any effects to the counsellor's activities and interventions. Finally we observed that in the schools in our sample the inspectorate almost never suggested the schools to contact the educational counsellors for help in the follow-up.

We will now take a closer look at the determinants of this (lack of) effect of the educational counsellors' activities.

(a) The format of the support activities

The format of most activities by the counsellors -being unique sessions- is a first determinant of its ineffectiveness. So even if the content is both sufficiently practical and relevant to the situation of the participants (which is not always the case), the lack of supportive follow-up activities results in very limited impact. The impact is almost completely dependent of the presence of an internal support network in the school. The schools in our sample did clearly not (yet) perceive the educational counsellors as external professionals that can be called upon and worked with in the implementation of longterm projects. This would imply a more frequent presence of the counsellor in the school.

Closely linked to this is the very limited availability of the counsellors for work in schools. They work in different contracts (part-time; full time; semi-voluntary) and are also used by the bodies of school boards for a whole range of other tasks (e.g. curriculum development; support for

beginning teachers; ...). In the perception of the schools they thus often simply are not there, when they are needed. On the other hand, schools do know that it is -often- not the individual counsellor who is to blame, but rather the very difficult working conditions they have to deal with: a large number of schools to support and the heavy work load of other duties they are given. Quite often schools seek support from other agencies, e.g. colleagues in other schools or even student-teachers that are doing their teaching practice.

(b) The perception of the counsellors' professional competences

A second determinant of the counsellors' (in)effectivity is the perception of their professional competences (e.g. communicative skills; curriculum knowledge; pedagogical compentences; etc.). In our research group this ranged from positive to very negative. It is self-evident that when counsellors are being perceived as incompetent in certain matters -in combination with their limited availability-, schools don't see them as a potential support in processes of quality improvement. However, in some positive cases the opposite appeared to be true as well: available and competent counsellors did make a difference and schools gratefully used them as supportive agents.

The counsellors themselves are often very well aware and frustrated about their minimal impact on the schools and they often refer to their lack of sanctioning power (compared to the inspectorate for example) as an explanation for it. Schools, however, don't make that attribution, although they do admit that initiatives by the counsellors, that are not immedeately relevant to the school's actual practice and priority, will remain without any effect.

(c) Characteristics of the schools

As for the inspectorate, the impact of the educational counsellors is also mediated by a series of factors within the schools. Many primary schools are still not used to their autonomy to develop independently a local policy of their own, e.g. deciding what external facilities to insert in their own projects. We have to remind here that the option by the policy makers to step back and give more autonomy to the schools constitutes a rupture with a longstanding tradition and culture of rather strict prescriptions and regulations. Principals and teachers in primary schools have been used to be mainly executing the instructions "from above", and this tradition clearly seems to still play a part in the schools' reaction to the new policy.

Closely linked with this is -again- the lack of internal support structures within the schools, in combination with the non-availability of the educational counsellors for long-term process

support. If the principal doesn't take up this support, or creates structures (e.g. task forces; steering committee) together with his team, the impact of the counsellors' interventions remains very limited. Yet, on the other hand, in schools with well-established and good functioning internal support structures the staff doesn't see the need for external support by the counsellor. They tend to attribute internally their successes: "we are doing okay".

We must, thus, conclude from our study that in general the body of educational counsellors has not (yet) been able to make itself a powerfull tool for the quality improvement of schools. Explanations for this failure can be found in 1) the structural working conditions of the counsellors; 2) their specific professional competence; and 3) cultural and structural conditions in the school.

(3) Determinants of the effects of INSET

Contrary to the inspectorate and the educational counsellors, two bodies created by the government to perform specific tasks, the INSET is a free-market, with training offers on a wide range of topics, provided by a whole variety of organizations. The list of themes on which INSET was followed by the schools in our study is highly variable and quite long. Even more than with inspectorate and counsellors it is the interaction between the particular characteristics of the INSET as it effectively took place on the one hand and the school context of the participants on the other, that determines whether and to what degree the INSET effectively contributes to quality improvement. From our analysis of the data we distinguished two clusters of determinants, both in their own way co-determining the INSET's effectivity.

The explanation teachers and principals themselves give for the participation in and the impact of INSET can be described in terms of a **cost/benefit-analysis**.[3] Different kinds of "costs" can be distinguished: financial, social-organizational, time and implementation costs. The *financial* costs of course refer to the question of who is paying for the participation and travel costs. The situation differs between schools, but there is clearly a trend that the financial costs of INSET are covered by the school (unless the costs are so high that they extend beyond the school's budget). For most teachers it is not evident that they would have to pay themselves for INSET. A second categorie of costs are *time costs*. When the INSET takes place outside normal school hours, participation is paid for with "leisure time". When teachers are really intrinsically motivated they accept these costs and are willing to make this investment. INSET during school hours

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3 Our analysis in this parallels House's ideas about a framework for appraising educational reforms, based on theories from the field of "transaction-cost economics" (House, 1996).

doesn't cost any leisure time, but costs "teaching time" and often -especially for small schools- implies *social-organizational* costs. For example, the participants' classes have to be taken over by the headteacher or by a colleague, which means an extra burden for them. Especially in schools were the teachers already have a heavy load of extra-duties (e.g. bus service; surveillance tasks, etc.) this might simply be too much to ask. Apart from that, teachers believe that it is unfortunate for their pupils if they have to be taken over (too often) by others or cannot be taught in their normal class situation.

Implementation costs finally refer to the efforts the participant has to make him/herself before the INSET content can be applied in the classroom. High implementation costs thus mean that the participant still has to invest a lot of time and energy before the new insights from the INSET can be turned into specific teaching and learning activities in the classroom or activities in the school. If a teacher fears that his/her participation in INSET will be negatively valued by colleagues (e.g. because of the extra work for them or because of the threat of having to change their normal practice), this can also be understood as a form of implementation cost. This however is closely connected to the school's local policy on INSET (see below).

The benefits of INSET are mainly thought of in terms of relevant information about or solutions to questions and problems in one's own practice (leadership or classroom teaching). INSET-activities that have almost direct relevance for or solutions to the own practice appear to effectively lead to changes in practice. The condition is that pupils or the school "benefit" from it. This is a very clear example of the "practicality-ethic" of teachers, as described by Doyle & Ponder (1977-1978).

Whether or not the school has an explicit and clear **local policy on INSET** is a second determinant of its effects. A first aspect in this is what could be called the *'policy of participation':* the habits or rules that regulate teachers' participation in INSET (free choice or imposed by the principal; on the basis of a clear plan of priorities in the school policy or on the basis of individual motivation and interest; etc.). This participation policy determines the meaning INSET participation gets within the school team (e.g. see implementation and/or social-organizational costs) and this meaning in its turn will then influence the impact (at the level of the individual participant or the level of the school). In a school without a clear policy on INSET ànd where participation means extra-work for colleagues, teachers show a clear resistance against subscribing to that INSET. It is just not worth the trouble, they seem to think.

At least as important as the policy on participation, is the *follow up of the INSET within the school*. What will be the place in the school for new insights one or more colleagues bring in from the INSET? Which conditions and opportunities are created within the school to make the knowledge from INSET available or usefull to other colleagues or to the entire school (e.g. staff meetings in which participants report on the INSET; the establishment of a task force to adapt

and implement the new knowledge in the own school; etc.). The principal has a very central role in the creation of conditions for effective dissemination of the information. Individual participants must know in advance what others will expect from their participation and in what way they will be expected to work further on what is learned in the INSET.
It will be clear that the effectivity of INSET is determined by a whole set of factors. Relevance for one's own practice and educational quality (content; pedagogy) of the INSET are of course important conditions. But whether or not this INSET will effectively influence the professional actions and thoughts of (groups of) teachers or the entire team, will depend on the complex interaction of different determinants. The cost/benefit analysis and the role of the local policy on INSET may have exemplified this.

After having presented the determinants of the impact by the three educational quality services on school and teacher development, we move our analysis further to a more in-depth understanding and explanation of the determinants by engaging in an explicit micropolitical reading of the data.

(4) The micropolitical use of external quality services

The different actors in the external quality services -in a different but complementary way- strive to influence teachers' actions and the functioning of the school. They try to effectively influence what happens in classrooms and schools. Inspectors do so from their legal mandate as evaluators and assessors of educational quality. The educational counsellors try to convince, to support and to help. And also the INSET aimes at changing teachers' and principals' actions and knowledge. In other words, they all strive to exercise power. Thus far our analysis has been focused on how schools react to the external quality services. However, schools and teachers are not merely passive recipients of imposed external interventions. Their coping with the external quality services also implies proactively using the external quality services for their own agendas.
In order to get a complete picture of the effects and impact by the external quality services, we need to broaden our analysis and include the so-called **micropolitical perspective**. This perspective "embraces those strategies by which individuals and groups in organizational contexts seek to use their resources of power and influence to further their interests" (Hoyle, 1982, p.88). Organizational behaviour is in this perspective understood as driven by interests (Ball, 1987; 1994; Blase, 1988;1991; Blase & Anderson, 1995;Altrichter & Salzgeber, 1996; Malen, 1994). We conceive of those interests in terms of **desired working conditions**. Teachers and principals have -partly individual, partly shared- opinions about what working conditions are desirable or

necessary for good job performance. "Good" then means both effective, in terms of pupils' learning outcomes, and personally satisfying for teacher or principal (see also Kelchtermans, 1996;Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1996). These desired working conditions constitute professional interests to the teachers and principals. Through micropolitical actions they will strive to **establish those conditions, to safeguard them in case they are threathened, or to restore them when they had got lost.**

In these micropolitical actions (establishing, safeguarding and restoring) we can distinguish different **categories of professional interests**. We called them: material, organizational, social-professional, cultural-ideological and self interests. These categories are further used to map the micropolitical use of the external quality services, as observed in our study. For now we want to stress that this micropolitical use of the external quality services is not an incidental or neglectable "unintended side-effect" of the quality services, but on the contrary is a "natural organizational phenomenon" (Altrichter & Salzgeber, 1996) and as such inherent to organizational functioning. Even if unintended, the micropolitical use of the external quality services by teachers and principals has a strong influence on the effectivity of the services and is therefore very relevant to our research interest.

(a) Micropolitics from material interests

By material interests we mean the availability of material, financial and infrastructural facilities, that contribute to teachers' and principal's feelings of efficacy (e.g. facilities for copying; funds for extra-muros activities or for buying teaching materials; a separate staff room; etc.). In School B1 e.g. the audit report is used as a means to put pressure on the school board in order to strenghten a longstanding demand by the school team for better facilities for physical education. Schools are further remarkably quick in taking up any recommendations by the inspectorate on material facilities or infrastructure (e.g. classroom furniture; fire security). Of course, those advices have the advantage of being fairly clear in what constitutes an effective solution. So the only possible obstacle are eventual financial restrictions. But at the same time these material issues also constitute relatively easy starting points for follow-up, by which the schools can show their "goodwill" to implement the recommended changes and thus appeal to the inspectorate's generosity in the follow-up audit (e.g. in cases with a negative or conditionally positive evaluation). As such the material issues get a cultural dimension: they symbolize and communicate the school's willingness to change its practice in order to improve its educational quality.

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(b) Micropolitics from organizational interests

Apart from a number of legal prescriptions, the way local schools are structured and organized is to a large extent a matter of internal decisions and negotiations. In this process different interests from different school members can converge, or rather interfere and conflict. In School B1, one of the teachers hopes for an explicit and positive appraisal of her work by the inspectors, as a positive element in her efforts to get a contract as tenured teacher (civil servant). She fears the competition from a younger colleague in this strive for tenure. This teacher expressed deep disappointment about the audit report that focuses on the entire school, without mentioning appraisal of individual teachers' work. Thus her general comment on the inspectorate and the audit procedure, in fact has to be read against the background of her own individual (micropolitical) agenda and concern for job security.

Organizational interests are also at stake in (beginning) teachers' suspicion and lack of trust in a counsellor whose advice is asked by and given to the principal in decisions about extending their contracts. For the counsellors providing this "service" to the principal sometimes is the price, in return for which they are allowed to work in the school.

A both more dramatic and more complex and dynamic example could be observed in school B7 where the principal -who had been heavily criticized by his teachers in their interviews with the inspectors- drew his conclusions from the report and sent in his resignation. One of the team members afterwards got appointed as new principal, but for him it is very difficult to gain authority among his former colleagues and to effectively go about dealing with certain problems. The inspectorate's report however gives him the opportunity to rearrange the allocation of the teachers to the different Grades and to replace the teacher of the first Grade by a colleague more competent in working with young children. The report is thus used here as an external argument to implement "unpleasant" decisions. At the same time, the school board forbids the new principal to present the full report to the schoolteam -contrary to what the principal wanted to do-, thus further undermining the man's instable authority in the eyes of the teaching staff.

We also remind here the situation in School B6, where the inspector was asked by the principal to come and present the (negative) report to the team. The team members experienced the "public reading" of the report by the inspector as humiliating and as a denial of their professionality, and reacted very negatively to the inspector. So he got all the blame and the principal -who actually agreed with the report- didn't have to state his opinion in public, thus keeping a more positive relation with his team and having a serene basis for developing follow up activities.

We finally also refer to the local policy on INSET , that is to be understood as a set of organizational conditions that can constitute interests to different members of the school team.

(c) Micropolitics from social-professional interests

The quality or the professional relations among members of a school team also constitutes an important categorie of professional interests (see e.g. Clement & Vandenberghe, 1997; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). We already mentioned the fact that principals use inspectors or counsellors in order to strengthen their own power position. In schools with "weak" principals, we found that the principal was often more inclined to subscribe to the inspectorate's assessment than the teachers were. In two cases this was observed in a very outspoken way, as if the principals hoped that the inspectorate's authority would then reflect on them. In School B5 for example, the principal was firstly very disappointed about the report, but after being cheered up in a meeting with the counsellor, he could accept the conclusions and even defended them before the school team.

In School B3 the audit by the inspectorate had a strong positive effect (at least in the short term) on the climate and the relations among the school team. The reason, however, was the very arrogant and authoritarian attitude of one of the inspectors during the audit. This caused so much anger and frustration among the team, that they were strongly motivated to make sure that in the follow-up audit a positive assessment would be achieved. Thus, here we saw a mechanism of "all against one", which positively affected the development within the school.

Sometimes teachers also purposefully influenced the social-professional relations in the team to defend the status-quo and avoid that they would have to change their practice. In B3, the presentation during a staff meeting by teachers of what they had learned during an INSET, made some colleagues react by insinuating that the INSET-participants behaved as pedants "as if they would know everything so much better". This way they tried to distract the attention from the content as a strategy to discredit their innovative messages in order to maintain the status quo and to avoid eventual imposed changes in their habits of teaching.

Finally, our analysis of the participation in and effects of INSET in terms of a cost/benefit balance also contained examples of social-professional interests (see the social-organisational "cost").

(d) Micropolitics from cultural-ideological interests

"Cultural-ideological interests" refer to the set of (more or less explicit) values, goals and norms that guide the work of teachers and schools. More in particular, micropolitics from cultural-ideological interests concern the processes by which certain values, norms and goals achieve the status of acknowledged, legitimate and binding cultural elements in the school and thus determine its functioning. Ultimately this touches the heart of the organization: what counts as impor-

tant, legitimate, binding in this school? The answer to this question depends on complex processes of ongoing meaning construction, negotiation, or even struggle and argument among team members.

A clear example of this can be found in school A3, where the visit by the inspectorate gave rise to (renewed) discussion about certain options in the educational project of the school. School A3 had a very strong focus on cognitive goals, although several teachers didn't really share this exclusive cognitive focus and had been arguing in favour of a broader set of educational goals, including also socio-emotional development and goals related to the development of creativity in children. Those teachers (a minority in the team) felt supported by the "hidden curriculum" in the audit procedure, that clearly subscribes to the idea of "development of the entire person", and in consequence to the audit they reopened the discussion. They thus hoped to use the audit report and the inspectorate's authority as powerful arguments to change the school's policy and priorities. The majority in the school team (including the principal), however, "read" in the conclusions of the audit report that they had apparently failed to convincingly account for and communicate their "cognitive" option. Since to them the problem was only a matter of effective communication and self represenation, all that had to be done in their opinion was making their options more explicit. The internal discussion -in which also the school board got involved- finally ended with a rewriting of the school's educational project in the sense that the cognitive option was explicitly presented and extensively accounted for. The "traditionalist" faction within the schoolteam had won this struggle over the "definition of the school" and formalised its victory in the project document.

The questioning of the legitimacy and validity of the audit procedure for not sufficiently acknowledging the specific options of the school (see above), is another example of cultural-ideological interests.

(e) Micropolitics from self-interests

As we have already argued elsewhere (Kelchtermans, 1993; 1996) teachers' and principals' conceptions of self are of crucial importance to their job. Safeguarding and eventually restoring one's positive self-esteem, personal task perception and job motivation thus constitute important "self interests". These self interests are also at stake in the way schools deal with the external quality services.

We already mentioned the example of the principal resigning after the negative audit reportmade public (school B7).

In school B2 the audit had also a very negative impact on the principal's self esteem, because he had hoped for an explicit appreciation of his work.

In School B9 the principal only refound his positive self esteem after a long "cheering up"-meeting with the counsellor, etc.

As far as different task perceptions are at stake in discussions about the school's priorities (see above (d)), they could also be read as self-interests among the different factions in the school staff.

In School B3 the self esteem of several team members had been negatively affected by the arrogant attitude of one inspector during the interview. Restoring that self esteem became a central concern for those teachers and from that negative experience they found it very hard to accept the conclusions of the report and feared to have to live through a similar experience again when the inspectors would do their follow up audit. Elsewhere we have already argued the moral and political roots of self doubts and how strong they affected teachers' actions and crippled their professional development (Kelchtermans, 1996). Similar conclusions can be drawn from our evaluation of the impact of external quality services.

From our analysis we have to conclude that it is very important to see that the presence and interventions of the external quality services provoke particular micropolitical processes and that the impact of those services is dependent on the professional interests of the principals and teachers involved. These interests reach beyond and are more complex than the strive for more educational quality. Quite often they involve very different concerns that are much more pressing in the teachers' and principal's experience.

The micropolitical analysis once more affirms the fact that the effect and impact of external quality services ultimately depends on and is mediated by the specific processes of meaningful interaction between the characteristics of the external quality services and the perceptions, interests and goals of school teams, in the particular context of that school (contextualisation).

To inspectors, counsellors and providers of INSET the conclusion thus is that they should be and remain alert to this inherent micropolitical dimension in their work and how it co-determines their impact and effectivity.

CONCLUSION

The general conclusion of our evaluation study is that the external quality services are not (yet) having the impact at the local school level, they were designed for by the Decree in 1991. Our analysis has revealed several explanations for this lack of effect. Summarizing, we want to highlight some of them again:

* the micropolitical processes in the schools, elicited by the external quality services. Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers (1992) describe similar processes in the implementation of teacher-

leadership. Weiss makes the same conclusion about the impact of interests and ideologies in the implementation of "shared decision-making" (Weiss, 1995) (see also Altrichter & Salzgeber, 1996 and Malen, 1994).

* the problem of specific professional competence for counsellors and principals. There is a clear need for (further) professional development of many Flemish counsellors. At least equally important, however, is a proper training for principals in order to make them capable of operating effectively in a changed policy context, where more responsibility is given to the local school. Betty Malen concludes in her review article on micropolitics that "the principal, structurally situated as 'gatekeeper', is positioned to buffer the school from external influences and to filter, forward or forstall demands" (Malen, 1994, p.153). However, the principal is at the same time confronted with the task to creatively and proactively provide or stimulate working conditions that allow both teacher and school development as a result of the external quality services. This links our study to the literature on teachers' work and work lives (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996; Blase & Anderson, 1995).
* the need for internal structures in the schools to support the incorporation or further development of the interventions by the external quality services. Quality improvement implies complex and longterm processes of learning and development of the people involved in the local context (Smylie, 1995). In that perspective, effective school counselling would probably have to focus more on initiating and supporting forms of school-based research and development by teachers and principal. The slowly growing literature on action research at the level of the school opens up promising perspectives (e.g. see Grundy, 1994; Haggarty & Postlethwaite, 1995; McTaggart, Henry & Johnson, 1997; Somekh & Thaler, 1997; Dadds, 1995).
* the strict distinction and separation between the different aspects of external quality services between different bodies and organizations, seems to be ineffective.

Marshall and Anderson, reviewing the influence of the social studies-approach in the study of educational policy, argue that this approach provoked a shift in the relationship between the macropolicy arena and its local or 'street-level' impact. "Traditional models have viewed the policy filtering process as flawed but capable of being rationalized through better implementation models. Cultural studies suggest that micropolitics at the local level involves complex forms of cultural and political resistance, accomodation, and compliance rooted in the informed intentionality of social actors." (Marshall & Anderson, 1994, p.173-174). Our study is a clear example of this shift. General policy measures get caught in local processes of interpretation, and (micropolitical) use that ultimately determine whether and to what degree they effectivily affect and influence the day-to-day life in the schools and classrooms. Educational policy analysis therefor should focus on the meso- and micro-levels of schools and classrooms in order

to understand in what way and why policy measures so often can't make the difference they intend to. The power of the micropolitical perspective as an analytical tool undoubtedly deserves further attention and development in this field.

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